



Memorandum

DATE: February 25, 2026
TO: Honorable Members of the Rent Stabilization Board
FROM: DéSeana Williams, Executive Director
By: Andrew Chang, Principal Program Manager
SUBJECT: Recommendation to Adopt a Language Access Policy

Recommendation

Staff recommends the adoption of a resolution to adopt an internal Language Access policy and protocols to include the following provisions and initial actions:

1. Create and maintain a page on the Rent Board's website that provides visitors with information on available language services and translated forms and is linked on the front page in a conspicuous location.
2. Immediately translate the most frequently-accessed public forms into Spanish and Simplified Mandarin Chinese and make these publicly available.
3. Include verbiage in Spanish, Simplified Chinese, and Arabic on the front page of all mailings, outreach materials, and petition packets, notifying recipients of available language services.
4. Include non-English-speaking communities and community groups in the Rent Board's outreach work plan, in alignment with the Rent Ordinance's stated purpose to advance housing policies regarding marginalized communities (Chapter 13.76.030).
5. Conduct a bi-annual review of the utilization of language services, community needs, and frequently used forms, and return to the Outreach Committee with findings and recommendations for further action.

Background and Need for Committee Action

On January 9, 2026, the members of the Outreach Committee discussed initial considerations for a Language Access Policy and requested staff to conduct further research and provide a cost estimate for the initial translation of all Rent Board Forms.

On January 28, 2026, the Outreach Committee received the results of staff's research, discussed potential policy considerations, and requested staff to return with a

recommendation to address the requested points of discussion, including identification of five most frequently-used forms by the public, and proposed policy guidelines to be included in a Language Access policy.

Rent Board staff have identified the following documents as immediate priorities for translation:

1. Petition Filing Rules
2. Tenant Petition for Individual Rent Adjustment and Schedules A-D
3. Petition to Establish Tenant Association
4. Landlord Petition
5. Mediation Request Form

Financial Impact

Translation of the most frequently used documents into Spanish and Mandarin Chinese will require an upfront investment in document translation services. Staff has requested a detailed estimate from Language Line for Spanish and Mandarin Chinese translation and WCAG compliance services for both Spanish and Chinese documents. Based on established rates this one-time cost is estimated at approximately \$5,000.

Future costs may vary annually depending on identified needs for translation of forms and other documents, as well as the specific services utilized.

Contact Person

For questions regarding this item please contact Andrew Chang, Principal Program Manager, at achang@berkeleyca.gov or at (510) 981-4947.

Attachments

1. Resolution 26-15
2. DRAFT Language Access Policy

RESOLUTION 26-15

ADOPTING A LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES POLICY

BE IT RESOLVED by the Rent Stabilization Board of the City of Berkeley (“Board”) as follows:

WHEREAS, the Board is an independently governed, fee-funded public agency responsible for administering the City’s rent stabilization and housing programs; and

WHEREAS, the Board operates separately from other City departments and is not subject to the Berkeley City Council, the Mayor, or the City Manager's control with respect to its internal policies and financial governance; and

WHEREAS, the Board seeks to increase accessibility to limited English proficiency individuals and communities in the City of Berkeley, in alignment with the Purpose stated in Chapter 13.76.030 of the Rent Stabilization Ordinance, to advance the housing policies of the City with regard to marginalized communities and persons with disabilities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board hereby adopts the attached Language Access Policy which directs staff to take immediate actions to improve accessibility to Rent Board services and information for limited English proficiency individuals and communities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Language Access Policy establishes protocols and guidelines for the ongoing evaluation and further improvement of the Rent Board’s language access services;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Language Access Policy shall govern the external communications protocols and practices of the Rent Board and shall be implemented through the annual budget; and

RESOLUTION 26-15

ADOPTING A LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES POLICY (Page 2)

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Executive Director is authorized to administer the Operating Reserve Policy consistent with its terms and to report on reserve levels and any reserve use as required by the policy.

Dated: March 23, 2026

Adopted by the Rent Stabilization Board of the City of Berkeley by the following vote:

YES:

NO:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT:

Soli Alpert, Chair
Rent Stabilization Board

Attest: _____
DéSeana Williams, Executive Director



Rent Stabilization Board Language Access Policy

Policy title: Language Access Policy

Adopted by: Rent Stabilization Board

Effective Date: March 23, 2026

Applies to: All Rent Board Units

Responsible Parties: Executive Director; Outreach & Accessibility Committee (review); Full Board (oversight)

I. Purpose

The purpose of the Language Access Policy (Policy) is to establish standards and procedures for providing equal access to Rent Board services to all its clients, including those who primarily speak languages other than English, in alignment with the purposes stated in the Rent Stabilization Ordinance.

II. Definitions

As used in this Policy, the following items shall have the following meanings:

- “Agency” refers to the Rent Stabilization Board.
- “Bilingual Employee” refers to Rent Board employees proficient in a non-English language and receiving a Bilingual Premium pay differential.
- “City” refers to the City of Berkeley.
- “Required Languages” refers to the non-English languages defined in Section III of this Policy.
- “Policy” refers to the Language Access Policy.

III. Designated Languages

Services and materials identified by the Executive Director shall be provided in Spanish, Simplified Mandarin Chinese, and Arabic. Services in other languages shall be provided only upon request.

IV. Document Translation & Over-the-Phone Translation

The Agency shall utilize the City’s established on-call contract with Language Line for Document Translation & Over-the-Phone Conversational Translation Services. Should

this contract become unavailable, the Executive Director may procure these services independently.

The Agency shall regularly review usage of literature and forms and provide translation of the most frequently-used or frequently-requested forms into the Required Languages.

The Agency shall provide document translation upon client request, in languages available through Language Line that are not part of the Required Languages.

The Agency shall provide Over-the-Phone translation services upon request for Counseling, Mediation, and Hearings.

V. Communications & Community Outreach

The Agency shall include verbiage in the Required Languages on the front page of all mailings, outreach materials, and petition packets, notifying the recipients of available language services.

The Agency shall create a dedicated page on its public-facing web site that includes information on available language services including translated literature and forms. This page shall be linked on the front page of the Agency web site in a conspicuous location.

The Agency shall include outreach to non-English-speaking communities and community groups in the Rent Board's annual outreach work plan.

VI. Approval and Governance

The Rent Stabilization Board has sole authority to adopt, amend, and oversee this Language Access Policy. The Executive Director shall be responsible for implementing and monitoring compliance with the Policy and shall update the Outreach & Accessibility Committee and the full Board on a bi-annual basis.